

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 *The Park*

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) was established by the United States Congress in 1978 “. . . to preserve its scenic, natural, and historic setting and its public health value as an air shed for the Southern California metropolitan area while providing for the recreational and educational need of the visiting public.” The park was founded on a partnership among federal and state park agencies, as well as local governments and private landowners.

SMMNRA has relatively complex boundaries compared to other national park units. The legislated boundaries of the park generally cover the Santa Monica Mountain region in southern California, totaling 150,050 acres, of which 69,099 acres are currently protected parkland. This area extends from the Hollywood Bowl on the east to Point Mugu on the west, from U.S. Highway 101 on the north to the Pacific Ocean on the south. The park’s boundaries encompass an area approximately 46 miles from east to west and averaging 7 miles from north to south. The park’s relative location to the rest of southern California is shown on Figure 1-1, Regional Map.

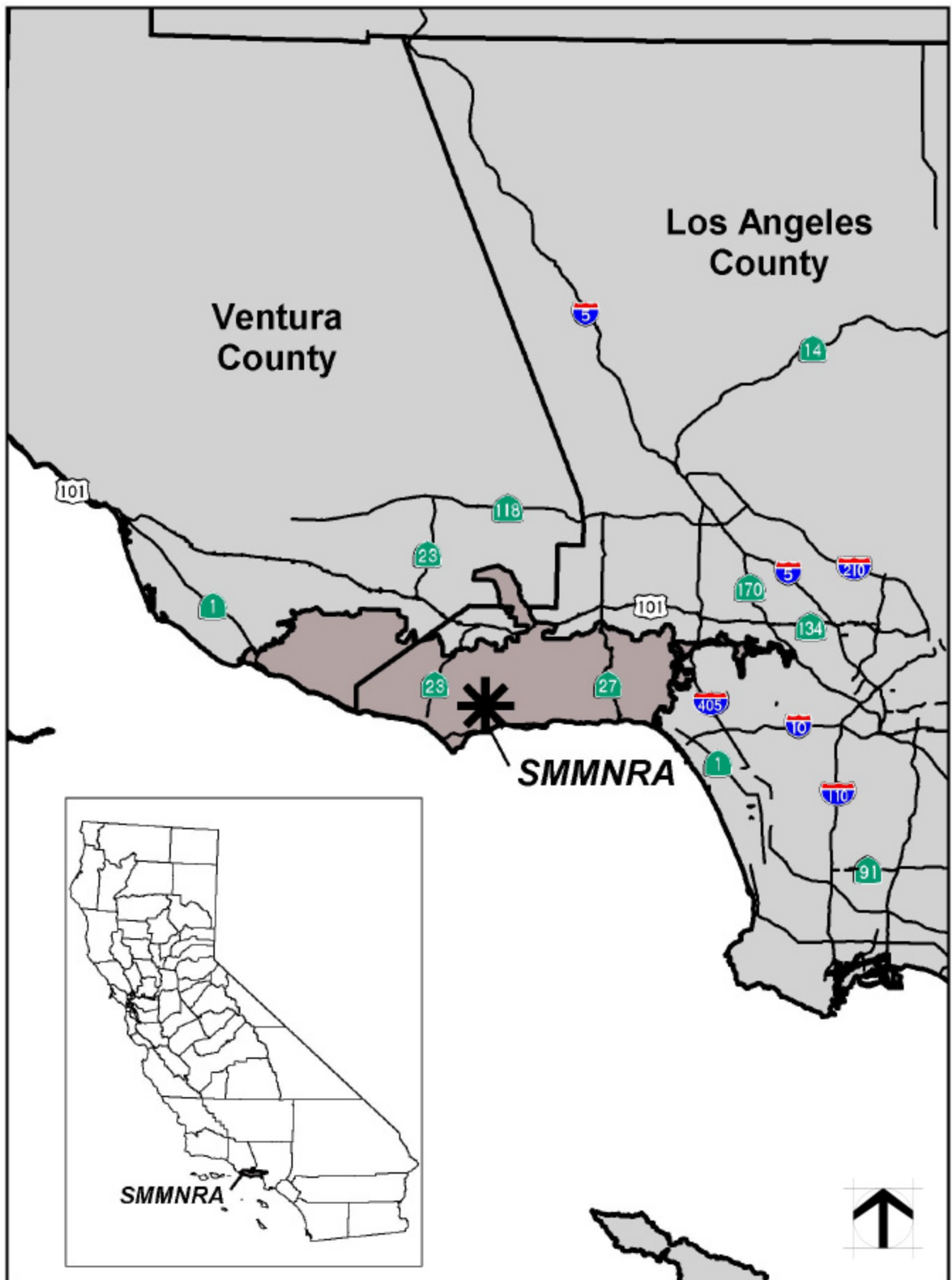
### 1.1.1 THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The SMMNRA represents one of the world’s last remaining examples of a mediterranean ecosystem. The mountains and beaches of the recreation area form a dramatic contrast to the urban sprawl of the San Fernando Valley and the Los Angeles Basin. The east/west-trending mountain range is geologically complex and characterized by steep, rugged mountain slopes and canyons. Elevations range from sea level to more than 3,000 feet. The adjacent scenic California coastline features beaches and rocky tide pools and lagoons.

There is a tremendous ecological diversity within the recreation area. Grassy hills, oak woodlands, valley oak savannas, rocky outcrops, riparian woodlands, chaparral-covered slopes, coastal marshes, rural residential areas, and agricultural areas are all found within its boundaries. Numerous mammals, nearly 400 species of birds and 35 species of reptiles and amphibians, are known to occur in the SMMNRA.

### 1.1.2 THE CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Santa Monica Mountains surround nationally significant ethnographic, archaeological, historic, and scenic resources. More than 1,000 known archaeological sites are located within the SMMNRA boundary, one of the highest densities of archaeological resources found in any mountain range in the



world. Nearly every major prehistoric and historic period associated with human interaction and development of the western United States is represented here. More than 73 historic sites in the Santa Monica Mountains are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Beginning in the late 1880s, the mountains were recognized as a resort mecca by recreation and sports clubs, nonprofit organizations, and churches. Large estates began to appear in the 1920s and continue to be built today. The easy accessibility and the varied topography of the Santa Monica Mountains were also key to the emergence of the movie industry in Los Angeles. Motion picture filming in the area spans the history of the industry, from silent movie making to modern television programming.

### 1.1.3 LAND OWNERSHIP

Land ownership within the park includes federal, state, and local agencies, as well as a majority of private landowners, including conservation organizations (see Table 1-1).

The National Park Service (NPS) “oversees” the SMMNRA, but currently has direct responsibility for less than 15 percent of the land within the boundaries. The NPS is a partner, sharing stewardship with other agencies and private landowners. The NPS responsibilities include operation, maintenance, resource management, education, and resource and visitor protection on all NPS lands. It also has less direct, but very clear, duties to support activities on non-NPS lands, consistent with the purposes of the SMMNRA. Among other properties, NPS lands include Paramount Ranch, Rocky Oaks, Solstice Canyon, and the Peter Strauss Ranch.

California State Parks (CSP) manages approximately 22 percent of the land within the SMMNRA boundaries. The CSP administers its lands according to classifications including wilderness, reserves, parks, recreation areas, historical units, and natural preserves. CSP units include, among others, Malibu Creek State Park and Malibu Lagoon State Beach.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) was established in 1979 to acquire land and turn it over to the appropriate land management agency. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is the land management arm of the SMMC, created under a joint powers agreement in cooperation with several local park agencies. The MRCA operates several SMMC holdings, including those in Corral Canyon.

### 1.1.4 THE PARK VISITORS

The SMMNRA attracts over 33 million visitors a year. The park is located within a one-hour drive from 17 million people. Visitors hike, bike, or horseback ride on hundreds of miles of mountain trails or drive on the scenic roads.

Population growth in the Los Angeles area and increasing visitation have created the need for more facilities, more parking, and more trails in the SMMNRA. Still, there are many people in the Los Angeles area that cannot reach the mountains and beaches due to the lack of public transportation,

**Table 1-1**  
**Land Ownership Within SMMNRA**

Private land	54 %
CSP land	22 %
NPS land	14 %
MRCA/SMMC land	4 %
Other Los Angeles County (non-parkland)	3 %
Other City of Los Angeles (non-parkland)	2 %
Miscellaneous public land	< 1 %
Conejo Open Space Conservancy Agency land	< 1 %
Other federal land (non-parkland)	< 1 %
Mountain Restoration Trust land	< 1 %
Los Angeles County parkland	< 1 %
City of Los Angeles parkland	< 1 %
Other state land (non-parkland)	< 1 %

insufficient information about how to access the recreation sites, and heavily congested roads during commuter periods and weekends.

### **1.1.5 THE PARK'S MISSION**

In 1997, the staff of the National Park Service, California State Parks, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy created a joint mission statement for the SMMNRA:

*The mission of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is to protect and enhance, on a sustainable basis, one of the world's last remaining examples of a Mediterranean ecosystem and to maintain the area's unique natural, cultural, and scenic resources, unimpaired for future generations. The SMMNRA is to provide an inter-linking system of parklands and open spaces that offer compatible recreation and education opportunities that are accessible to a diverse public. This is accomplished by an innovative federal, state, local, and private partnership that enhances the region's quality of life and provides a model for other parks challenged by urbanization.*

## **1.2 The Environmental Process**

### **1.2.1 THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to prepare environmental assessments or environmental impact statements prior to making decisions. The President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has adopted regulations and other guidance that provide general procedures for federal agencies to follow when preparing these documents.

The first step in the NEPA process is the determination of whether the proposed decision to be made is subject to NEPA. Generally, NEPA applies to most actions by a federal agency, requiring approval by a federal agency, or obtaining funding from a federal agency. Next, an environmental assessment (EA) is used to determine whether or not the proposed action would result in any significant environmental effects. If the EA finds that the action would not have a significant impact, or that any significant impact would be mitigated to less than significant levels, the EA leads to a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and no further environmental analysis or documentation is necessary. If, however, significant impacts are identified, and these impacts would not be mitigated to less than significant levels, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is required.

For the SMMNRA Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle Demonstration Project, an EA is being prepared, pursuant to NEPA, and a FONSI is anticipated as the appropriate environmental finding. (The EA is being prepared as a joint document with the California-required environmental document described below.)

For every proposed action subject to NEPA, one federal agency must serve as the lead agency, which is defined as the federal agency with the primary responsibility for complying with NEPA on the given proposed action. The lead agency for the SMMNRA Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle Demonstration Project EA is the National Park Service.

Under NEPA, cooperating agencies are any agency, other than the lead agency, that has discretionary authority over the proposed action, jurisdiction by law, or special expertise with respect to the environmental impacts expected to result from an action. For this project, cooperating agencies under NEPA are the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors.

### **1.2.2 THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT**

The main objectives of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) are to disclose to decision-makers and the public the significant environmental effects (if any) of proposed activities and to require agencies to avoid or reduce any environmental effects by implementing feasible alternatives or mitigation measures. The *California State CEQA Guidelines*, developed by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) and the state Resources Agency, are the primary rules and source of interpretation of CEQA.

The first step in the CEQA process is the determination of whether the proposed action is subject to CEQA, which is true if the proposed action must be considered a "project," as defined by CEQA. A project is an action that (1) requires an agency to exercise discretionary powers, (2) has the potential to result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, and (3) is not otherwise exempt from CEQA. If the action is subject to CEQA, the next step is to prepare an initial study (IS) to determine whether the project may have a significant environmental effect. If the IS finds that the project would not have a significant impact, or that any significant impact would be mitigated to less than significant levels, the IS leads to a Negative Declaration (ND) or a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND), and no further environmental analysis or documentation is necessary. If, however, significant impacts are identified, and these impacts would not be mitigated to less than significant levels, an environmental impact report (EIR) is required.

For the SMMNRA Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle Demonstration Project, an IS is being prepared pursuant to CEQA and a MND is proposed as the appropriate environmental finding. The IS is being prepared as a joint document with the EA.

Under CEQA, the lead agency is the local or state agency that has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving the project and, therefore, the principal responsibility for preparing the CEQA document. The lead agency for the IS is the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

CEQA also identifies roles for responsible agencies, which are similar to cooperating agencies under NEPA. A responsible agency is an agency other than the lead agency that has legal responsibility for carrying out or approving the project. For this project, the cooperating agencies are the National Park Service and the Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors.

### **1.2.3 THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

In 2000, the National Park Service, California State Parks, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy drafted a new general management plan (GMP) and EIS for the SMMNRA, updating the original 1982 GMP. The Draft GMP/EIS (December 2000) offered five alternative approaches to manage the recreation area throughout the following 15 to 20 years. Each alternative was examined for its potential impacts on the environment.

An extensive public participation process was undertaken in 2001. Hundreds of comments were received and responded to. The final GMP/EIS is anticipated to be complete by May of 2002.

NPS does not anticipate any substantial changes to the portions of the Draft GMP/EIS that address transportation for the planned shuttle system. This EA/IS document incorporates by reference the 2000 Draft GMP/EIS.